THE SIKH MESSENGER

THE QUARTERLY MAGAZINE OF THE NETWORK OF SIKH ORGANISATIONS

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EDITORIAL

Tribute to the late Queen Elizabeth II

EDITOR Lord (Indarjit) Singh

Sikhism is an egalitarian religion that does not judge people by accident of birth but by what they contribute to society. The late Queen Elizabeth II did much to move the overtly racist Britain at the start of her reign, to a more welcoming approach to those of a different religion or different colour of skin. People of colour and different creeds were increasingly seen at royal events and social functions. Her Christmas day broadcasts regularly included generous references to the contribution of new arrivals to British society.

The Annual Commonwealth Service at Westminster Abbey was central to her life. The Abbey was chosen for this gathering because in is what is known as a 'Royal Peculiar', which allows readings and contributions from people of other faiths. One year, it was suggested that the Service should be held at a different church where only Christian prayers could be read. The Queen, who rarely expressed an opinion, promptly said, 'if you do that, I won't come'.

In 2002, the Queen decided to mark her Golden Jubilee with a visit to other places of worship. I was asked to organise a visit to a gurdwara in Leicester, where she would also visit a local mosque. She readily agreed to the etiquette associated with entering a gurdwara, and movingly placed a posy of flowers given to her by the Guru Granth Sahib as a mark of respect.

King Charles III movingly described her life as dedicated to the service of the community. We are confident he will follow in his late mother's footsteps. He Has always been a good friend of Sikhs and spoke impressively as the Guest of Honour at Royal Albert Hall functions organised by the Network of Sikh Organisations UK. In the 1999 function held to celebrate the birth of the Khalsa, he movingly said'

I have developed a great respect and admiration of your faith. Sikhism teaches and Sikhs aspire to tolerance, a willingness to stand up and be counted, a repudiation of discrimination on grounds of caste or race and the dignity and equality of women. These values have, I think, a universal appeal'.

On the Friday before his mother's funeral, King Charles III invited faith representatives to Buckingham palace and made a moving speech in which he pledged to uphold not only the Christian faith, but also the right of all faiths to worship in the manner of their choice, something central to Sikh teachings. We wish him a long and healthy life to make his high ideals a wider reality in our troubled world.

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Director: The Lord Singh of Wimbledon C.B.E., DL

9 September 2022.

HM King Charles III
Buckingham Palace
London SW1A 1AA

Your Majesty,

On behalf of myself, my colleagues in the Network of Sikh Organisations and the wider British Sikh community, I "would like to pass on our deepest condolences on the death of Her Majesty the Queen. Her passing marks a moment of great sorrow and reflection for us all.

Her life was one of selfless service to her subjects, an unparalleled service conducted with both dignity and humility throughout her seventy-year reign.

I have had the good fortune of meeting the Queen on several occasions and being invited for lunch at Buckingham Palace. I recall the privilege of accompanying Her Majesty during her first visit to a gurdwara in Leicester in 2002. It was during her Golden Jubilee celebrations, that she made clear that she was the sovereign for all her people, and that our different religions show that God's love extends in equal measure to the whole of humanity; a resonant echo of Sikh teachings that shows the important commonalities between our different faiths.

Her Majesty's commitment to the service of others, contribution to society and humility in all she did, are qualities that Sikhs aspire to embody in their lives. Sikhs will always remember her with love and affection.

Yours Respectfully,

Indarjit, Lord Singh of Wimbledon
Director, Network of Sikh Organisations UK

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HRH KING CHARLES III ADDRESSES FAITH LEADERS

Meeting at Buckingham Palace on Friday 16th September 2022

The Address

My Lord Archbishop, Dean, Ladies and Gentlemen. I am very grateful to have had this opportunity to meet you all, so soon after my Accession, in what are inevitably the saddest of circumstances for me and my Family. I have been touched by your kind words of condolence more than I can possibly say. They mean a great deal to me.

I also wanted, before all of you today, to confirm my determination to carry out my responsibilities as Sovereign of all communities around this country and the Commonwealth and in a way which reflects the world in which we now live.

I am a committed Anglican Christian, and at my Coronation I will take an oath relating to the settlement of the Church of England. At my Accession, I have already solemnly given– as has every Sovereign over the last 300 years – an Oath which pledges to maintain and preserve the Protestant faith in Scotland.

I have always thought of Britain as a 'community of communities.' That has led me to understand that the Sovereign has an additional duty – less formally recognized but to be no less diligently discharged. It is the duty to protect the diversity of our country, including by protecting the space for Faith itself and its practise through the religions, cultures, traditions and beliefs to which our hearts and minds direct us as individuals. This diversity is not just enshrined in the laws of our country, it is enjoined by my own faith. As a member of the Church of England, my Christian beliefs have love at their very heart. By my most profound convictions, therefore – as well as by my position as Sovereign – I hold myself bound to respect those who follow other spiritual paths, as well as those who seek to live their lives in accordance with secular ideals.

The beliefs that flourish in, and contribute to, our richly diverse society differ. They, and our society, can only thrive through a clear collective commitment to those vital principles of freedom of conscience, generosity of spirit and care for others which are, to me, the essence of our nationhood. I am determined, as King, to preserve and promote those principles across all communities, and for all beliefs, with all my heart.

This conviction was the foundation of everything my beloved mother did for our country, over her years as our Queen. It has been the foundation of my own work as Prince of Wales. It will continue to be the foundation of all my work as King.

See back cover for photos.

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NETWORK OF SIKH ORGANISATIONS UK ANNUAL REPORT 21-22

Sikh Schools and Education

A fundamental tenant of Sikhism is that of sikhya, to learn. An educational concept embodied in every aspect of Sikh ideology and practice, from the daily routine to the philosophy of re-incarnation. We are privileged to be participants on Earth in order that we may know right from wrong, do good to others, refine our spiritual understanding and so gain salvation. Education stands at the centre, giving us the knowledge and skills to improve the World and helping us to develop spiritually. In my mind, it is this that has defined the NSO from its onset. We have had years of wisdom gleaned from The Thought for the Day, The Sikh Messenger, the Press Releases, NSO Campaigns and much more. There is however, a less visible NSO involvement in Education in the United Kingdom which has not only shaped the national educational landscape, but more importantly, shaped the lives of thousands of young students across the country.

The NSO, together with representatives of the Sikh community, has worked tirelessly with the Department of Education (DfE) to establish most of the Sikh faith schools in the UK over the last three decades. The first to be established was the Guru Nanak School in Hayes followed by Khalsa Primary School in Slough. Today there are thirteen Sikh faith/ethos schools and whilst progress has slowed down in line with the DFE's Free Schools programme, the NSO continues to work with Sikh leaders to ensure greater access to Sikh Faith based education across the country. The NSO is currently the endorsing religious authority for several Sikh schools in the UK and is therefore the custodian of each school's religious character.

In recognition of the NSO's expertise in education, the DfE also funds the NSO to carry out inspections of the religious education in Sikh schools, referred to as Ofsted Section 48 inspections. Deputy Director, Lady Singh has been Her Majesty's Additional Inspector for state maintained and independent schools as well as Sikh schools since the inception of Ofsted and has conducted the Section 48 inspections for all schools under the guidance of the NSO.

Outcomes are very high in a majority of the schools and most are oversubscribed. Students learn the national curriculum whilst also learning about Sikhi and engaging in Paath, Kirtan, Santhya and other Sikh related enrichment. All the Sikh Schools are huge projects which will far outlive any one generation of leaders. It is therefore of extreme importance that our Sikh Faith based schools deliver mainstream Sikhi religious education in accordance with the Akaal Takht Rehat Maryada. The schools are a key asset of the Sikh Community and not surprisingly, local communities around each school are very protective of the character of the school. The NSO has intervened on a number of occasions to help schools when required, and to convince the DfE not to take action against any school which was underperforming. The DfE has a

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responsibility to engage with the NSO regarding any issues in any one of the schools, and the NSO stands firm to protect the schools, and ensure they thrive.

DFE update

As we welcome our fifth education secretary in a year and wait to learn the new Prime Minister's priorities and plans, the impact of this year's schools bill is already being felt by our schools. All schools are expected to be part of an academy trust by 2030. Whilst this bill is currently on hold, the direction of travel is likely to continue towards consolidation of schools into Multi Academy Trusts with up to ten schools. This poses a risk to all our Sikh schools. There are only thirteen across the country, so unity is going to be of utmost importance. The NSO sees this as an opportunity for the community to unite for a worthy cause and will be working with the schools to ensure they are not impacted negatively by the latest DfE developments.

Report by Shaminder Reyatt

Religious Education Report by Satnam Singh Poonian

I have represented NSO on the Religious Education Council of England and Wales (REC) since May 2018. In May 2018 I was elected to the board of directors for a term of one year. During that year I attended all the board meetings and general meetings in London. I have also served on the Governance Committee of REC.

The Commission on Religious Education was established by the REC to review the legal, education and policy frameworks for Religious Education, by a wide-ranging, inclusive and evidence-based process designed to inform policy makers.

As previously reported in September 2018, the Commission released its final report, ***Religion and Worldviews: the way forward.*** A national plan for RE. It sets out a National Plan for RE with 11 recommendations and calls on the Government to consider and adopt it.

Main change to note is that the commission proposed that the subject of Religious Education should be called Religion and Worldviews. The subject should explore the important role that religious and non-religious worldviews play in all human life. REC and NASACRE project - Still Standing (2021) report made a number of recommendations for government, SACREs and NASACRE. It is also piloting the concept of local advisory networks for religion and worldviews.

1. RE Today Services and the REC infrastructure projects – Enhancing RE at a regional level and implementing communication from classroom to the research community, supporting NATRE local groups and National lead director.

2. Investing in the Workforce for RE is still a problem. Funding for Subject Knowledge Enhancement courses is still in place but the bursary payment for secondary RE initial teacher training were retracted in 2021. The REC continues to lobby for their reinstatement. There is continuing absence of government investment in this sector and the REC continues to monitor RE teacher recruitment.

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3. Ofsted's revised Education Inspection Framework (2019) was successfully lobbied, during the consultation stage, to toughen the language around the provision and quality of RE. NATRE reports that there is evidence that training of inspectors has led to a greater awareness of the place of RE in schools. DfE is exploring ways to ensure that all schools are held accountable for the quality of their RE. The REC, NATRE, teacher and head teacher unions have lobbied the DfE on the right to withdraw from RE. The Welsh government has removed the right to withdraw from religion, values and ethics.

I did point out that most schools cover only 2 or 3 major religions in the classroom and discharge their obligation by an odd visit to the place of worship of other minority religions. In relation to the widespread ignorance about the Sikh faith I pointed out that violent incidents of bullying in schools against Sikh children are on increase. In some cases their turbans have been pulled off by the bullies. Special consideration must be given to faiths such as Sikhism to promote better understanding and harmony amongst our very diverse society.

I have also been attending Ofsted's Schools with Religious Character meetings. The last meeting was held on 16th May 2022. At this meeting we discussed the 'briefings for inspectors about faith contexts'. In this meeting a presentation entitled 'RE and the quality of education in the education inspection framework' was delivered by Dr Richard Kueh (Her Majesty's Inspector Subject Lead – Religious Education)
Satnam Singh Poonian.

Armed Services Chaplaincy.

Contributed towards the new Chaplaincy Museum creation at Defence Academy donating artefacts and technical support. Presented at an online conference for Spiritual Resilience, Women's Day and Diversity Awareness.
Participated at events organised by the Home Office, the Metropolitan Police and the West Midlands Police such as 50 years of first Asian Women. Throughout the year contributed towards various engagement projects such as wellbeing lunch time seminars, National Lottery Heritage Fund - Defence Women contribution, Birmingham council, Universities talks, Sikh assembly and other Sikh Organisations.

Represented Chaplaincy & Delivered a re-call day to Defence Medical staff - Covid trauma and experience. Have been proactive in the role even with all the challenges presented by people or events. Constantly exploring ideas/ ways to do more to fulfil Armed Forces Chaplaincy Centre mission.

Working on the document detailing Sikh imagination to be introduced as online resource for AFCC course. Addressed the New Entrant Chaplain's course at the AFCC. Delivered at Faith Days across regiments. Talks delivered to Potential Officer Development Programs from Sikh perspective. Worked with Navy Engagement team of on few Sikh Navy projects particularly involving HMS Sikh. Hosted the highest Sikh authority Jathedar from Akaal Takhat Amritsar at Sandhurst not only to offer Defence familiarisation but also to discuss challenging issues around Sikh faith and policies concerning Sikhs in the Armed Services. This visit led to development of very good

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rapport with the Jathedar, with a promise of ongoing support in our projects. Supported Belief Network Conference, Religion Awareness Day, Diversity Allies Workshops, People Symposium - Religion Study Day.

Regular support to all Sikh in the Services and their families, some on demand some on pro-active basis via the means of physical visits, Skype, Zoom and phone calls/ messages. Dealt with some very traumatic cases. Provided remote support in and out of office hours. During national travel restrictions, continued to provide support virtually via platforms like zoom and MS teams etc. Provided Faith services virtually and physically. Celebrated a number of major festivals virtually - making them creative and innovative when physical events were not possible. e.g. Vaisakhi and Diwali. Zoom celebrations of Gurpurabs. Sikh New Year and other major festivals.

Successfully contributed towards the RAF auxiliary role as a Chaplain. This role has complimented CCM role very well. Delivered various national service which posed the challenge of creating the service from scratch and making sure it resonates with wider audience and not only a particular tradition – even though taking inspiration from my own Faith. Delivered Beliefs Value Programme, Care in Leadership teachings across training establishments. Conducted graduations along with providing all souls ministry across RAF. Continue to support my own 611 Sqn and University Sqn as and when required. Throughout the year represented Chaplaincy at events and presented several faith talks.

Mandeep Kaur NSO Chaplain to the Armed Services

Media and Parliament

Press Releases

New Year's Message from the Director of the Network of Sikh Organisations

31st December 2021 Waheguru ji ka Khalsa; Waheguru ji ki Fateh.

As we leave 2021 and enter 2022, it is important that we look closely at the forces and pressures that resonate in the Sikh community and reflect on how these help or hinder us in living true to our Gurus' teachings.
Best wishes for a wonderful New Year. Indarjit Lord Singh of Wimbledon

Reflecting on Sikh teachings during the COP26 – 4th November 2021
The UN Climate Change Conference or COP26, is underway in Glasgow this week with heads of nations who face the worst impact of climate change being the most vocal about the consequences of global warming. Rising temperatures are resulting in rising sea levels and extreme weather conditions – and island nations like Barbados face serious consequences with the rise in global temperatures.

Sikh View on Organ Donation – 22nd July 2021
Give the gift of life after your death, please talk to your family. This will give them the certainty that they need to support your decision at a difficult time. Talk about your faith, what the Gurus say.

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Question from Lord Singh (Director NSO) to Foreign and Commonwealth Office Asked 13 November 2017.

Lord Question on Jagtar Singh Johal

'To ask Her Majesty's Government what representations they have made to the government of India concerning the arrest of UK citizen Jagtar Singh Johal; and what response, if any, they have received.'

Minister's Response

'The British High Commission has raised this case with the Indian authorities. Following high level lobbying, consular staff visited Mr Johal on 16th November. The Rt Hon Field, the Minister for Asia and the Pacific met with Mr Johal's MP and brother on 27 November. We will continue to raise this case with the authorities to ensure we have regular and full consular access.'

NSO Schools Improvement Services – April 23rd 2021

The Sikh community with the support of the DfE have made tremendous efforts to establish their local faith schools over the last three decades. Most of the schools are thriving and outcomes are high.However when a school seriously underperforms and is threatened for academisation or re-brokerage, the issues can rapidly become highly sensitive for the local community. In some cases, this is due to the increasingly complex religious sectarian issues within the Sikh community.

Director's Vaisakhi Message – 13th April 2021

Once again Sikhs throughout the world are celebrating the festival of Vaisakhi, one of the most important days in the Sikh calendar. Vaisakhi is a tale of brave martyrdom followed by the challenge of new beginnings. Best wishes on Vaisakhi to all-. Lord Indarjit Singh of Wimbledon.

Director's Note on the meaning of Vaisakhi

The story of Vaisakhi begins with the martyrdom in Delhi of Guru Teg Bahadur, 9th Guru of the Sikhs, whose 400th birth anniversary we are celebrating this month. The Guru, who disagreed with many aspects of Hindu teachings was publicly beheaded by the Mughal rulers for trying to protect the Hindu community's right to freedom of belief and worship. The Mughal emperor then challenged the Sikhs who at that time, had no distinguishing appearance, to claim their master's body. But in the event no one came forward. The Guru's young son Gobind now became Guru, and as he grew into manhood, he constantly stressed that Sikhs should always be ready to stand up for their beliefs, however difficult the circumstances. Then he decided to put the community to the test.

Director's letter in *The Times* - Anglo-French relations and Channel Crisis – 29th November 2021

Sir, Asylum seekers who risk their lives, in small leaky boats, desperately trying to rebuild shattered lives are human beings deserving compassion, not unwanted objects to be shuttled between countries. Lord Singh of Wimbledon

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NSO Evidence submission to Joint Human Rights Committee – on freedom of expression – 12th October 2021

Concerns expressed by Deputy Director Hardeep Singh

Does hate speech law need to be updated or clarified as shifting social attitudes lead some to consider commonly held views hateful? There is a growing pressure across society to avoid talking frankly and expressing legitimate opinions about certain subjects, for fear of being labelled a 'phobe' of some description or being accused of 'hate speech'. This fear has a chilling effect on free speech and the increase in 'cancel culture', means more and more people are less likely to express legitimate and sincerely held beliefs publicly. Non-Crime Hate Incident or NCHIs are recorded against individuals who express unpopular opinions on issues such as gender, race, and religion - alleged 'perpetrators' are often not even aware of it, and an NCHI can appear against their names on advanced DBS checks.

Director's letter in *The Times* on grooming gangs – 1st June 2021

Your article of 27th May 2021 'Police 'failing to protect' thousands of girls at risk of sexual abuse' paints a depressing picture of how authorities have and continue to fail vulnerable children at risk of sexual abuse.

Senior Faith Leaders from all major UK Faiths support the Platinum Jubilee Beacons (Integra Press Release) – 4th February 2022

'I feel the Beacons Project is an excellent way to celebrate the Platinum Jubilee of HM The Queen; a joyous event in the UK and many countries abroad. Beacons in different parts of the UK and Commonwealth will shine a light on HM The Queen's important contribution to values that we as Sikhs support, including selfless service and respect for all faiths and beliefs.' Lord Singh of Wimbledon, Director at Network of Sikh Organisations UK

Lord Singh contributions – Hansard

Schools: Extremism and Intolerance – 28th March 2022

My Lords, does the Minister agree that extremism arises from claims that the one God of us all has human prejudices and is more favourably disposed to our particular faith, as opposed to others', no matter how we behave towards others? Does she further agree that the teaching of RE in schools should emphasise ethical commonalities, which are much greater than the smaller area of conflict-producing differences?

Prisons: Releasing Women into Safe and Secure Housing – 21st March 2022

My Lords, I declare an interest as head of the Sikh prison chaplaincy service. Prison chaplains can play an important role in rehabilitation. Does the Minister agree that smaller faiths should have the same access to prisoners, in education, pastoral care and so on, as the larger faiths?

Ukraine: Visa Restrictions for Refugees – 28th February 2022

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My Lords, the Bible says that we should be kind to strangers. Would the Minister agree that the policy of the Government in that respect is not in accord with Christian teachings?

National Disability Strategy – 10 February 2022

Does the Minister agree that a country's civilisation is measured by the care and compassion it gives its disabled and vulnerable citizens—a role all too often left to charities with inadequate resources? Charities such as Action for ME work with inadequate resources to improve the lives of those with this debilitating condition. Will the Government conduct a full review of current ME provision, with a view to establishing a national strategy for ME in the UK?

Criminal Justice: Royal Commission – 7th February 2022

My Lords, I refer to my interest as director of the Sikh prison chaplaincy service. Reducing reoffending should be a central aim in any criminal justice system. Does the Minister agree that chaplains of all faiths can play an important role in this by giving purpose and direction to offenders? Does he further agree that there should be equal access to resources and pastoral support for all faiths in a truly multifaith chaplaincy and probation service?

Railway Stations: Facilities – 1st February 2022

My Lords, the Punjabi word for travel is "safar". Does the Minister think that this is an apt description of the difficulties experienced by disabled and non-disabled people travelling by rail?

Middle East: Human Rights – 31st January 2022

My Lords, do any of the places visited allow those of other faiths, particularly non-Abrahamic faiths, to have their own places of worship and to practise their religion freely, as required under Article 18?

Ukraine: Military and Non-military Support – 25th January 2022

My Lords, Russia should be completely aware of the serious consequences of military intervention. Too much "Just you dare" talk can elicit the opposite reaction. Nations, like children, do not take kindly to being pushed into that position; they do not like to lose face, so we have to be very careful in the way we talk.

Middle East: Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps – 19th January 2022

My Lords, does the Minister agree that religious fanaticism, on which groups such as the revolutionary guard, ISIS, and some here in the UK thrive, is best countered by a far more robust questioning of dated negative culture, which attaches itself virus-like to religion? If religion is used in this way, it should be countered by vigorous debate. It is certainly not a private matter. Does the Minister agree that discussion and debate should be given priority?

Refugees: Mass Displacement – 6th January 2022

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My Lords, I, too, congratulate the noble Lord, Lord Alton, on securing this important debate on the root causes—I emphasise "root causes"—of conflicts that lead to the displacement of millions of people around the world.

The devastation of the Second World War and the Holocaust against the Jews and others led to the establishment of the United Nations and the Security Council, with the victor nations as permanent members. It was realised that conflicts result when one group or nation sees itself as superior or tries to impose its will on others. This led to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which recognises that we are all free and, importantly, equal. Sikh teachings remind us that this equality must also extend to women

Freedom of Speech – 10th December 2021

My Lords, I too am grateful to the most reverend Primate the Archbishop of Canterbury for initiating this important debate, and it is a real pleasure to follow the noble Lord, Lord Hannan, and his very clear message.

Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights reminds us:

"We should have the right to share our ideas with who we want, and in whichever way we choose."

The law of the land rightly states that this right is not absolute and makes it an offence to promote hatred or fear of any individual or group.

White Ribbon Campaign - 25 November 2021

My Lords, the commendable white ribbon initiative will clearly appeal to those appalled by violence against women, but it will do little to curb violent offenders. Does the Minister agree that to tackle violence against women we have to supplement the teachings of the three Rs at school with the other three Rs of right, wrong and responsibility so that children do not copy but challenge negative attitudes and irresponsible behaviour?

Islamophobia – 15 November 2021

My Lords, a phobia is a fear. An irrational fear of Muslims is best countered by leaders of the community explaining that discrimination against women and violent attitudes to other faiths have nothing to do with Islam. Will the Minister agree with a previous government statement that all faiths and beliefs should be given equal protection and that giving protection to one or two groups at the expense of others is totally contrary to Government's levelling-up agenda?

Refugees: Status – 2nd November 2021

My Lords, the involvement of external powers, whatever their motives, dramatically increases the number of refugees, and this can place an unfair burden on neighbouring safe but poorer countries. Does the Minister agree that external powers

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involved, directly or through the sale of arms, have a moral obligation to accept refugees that they have helped to create?

Royal Navy: Ships and Frigates – 14 Oct 2021

My Lords, the less money we spend on ships, the more we have to spend on social care. Does the Minister agree that, despite what we hear on the last night of the Proms, Britain has no God-given right to rule the waves? Strutting our importance across the world was questionable, but understandable in the 19th century. Today, it simply encourages others to do likewise.

Afghanistan: British Equipment and Training - 16 September 2021

My Lords, Afghanistan, like many of the world's poorest countries, is, as we have just heard, awash with sophisticated weaponry supplied by Britain, the West and other "friendly countries". Does the Minister agree that the UK's adding to this misery by hosting a cosy-sounding arms fair to boost income through the killing of innocents is both repugnant and immoral?

Education (Assemblies) Bill [HL] – 10th September 2021

My Lords, business in the House is always preceded by Christian Prayers. We are reminded that, at all times we should lay aside" private interests, prejudices, and partial affections".

Unfortunately, this laudable advice is soon forgotten as we begin to debate controversial issues, but at least the thought is right. As a Sikh, I can understand reference to God in Christian worship, but I have never been able to understand who or what is the Holy Ghost. My attitude to Prayers in the Lords is to go along with sentiments close to Sikh teachings and respect the right of Christians to their beliefs.

EU Bilateral Agreements for Asylum Seekers – 6th September 2021

My Lords, does the Minister agree that asylum seekers who sometimes risk their lives in small, leaky boats, desperately trying to rebuild shattered lives, are human beings deserving of compassion, not unwanted objects to be shuttled between countries—particularly between countries that call themselves Christian?

Afghanistan - 18th August 2021

My Lords, history records that the Indian subcontinent was repeatedly invaded by Afghan armies bent on looting and carrying off captives for the slave and sex trade. There was very little resistance until the rule of Maharaja Ranjit Singh in the 1800s. He fought the marauding Afghans, freeing captives. After prolonged fighting, Sikh forces entered Kabul itself but, instead of acting vindictively, true to Sikh teachings, they showed respect for the Afghans and their places of worship. Trade and mutual respect led to the settlement of thousands of Sikhs in Afghanistan. Today, the latest figures show that there are fewer than 300 Hindus and Sikhs left, mostly huddled

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together in a Sikh gurdwara. Their lives are in great danger and I make an urgent plea to our Government to help them leave.

Human Rights Situation in India – 22 July 2021

My Lords, I thank the noble and right reverend Lord, Lord Harries, for securing this important debate. Partition of the subcontinent on the fallacy of irreconcilable religious difference gave a green light to religious bigots in India and Pakistan. In 1984, Indira Gandhi's mass appeal to bigotry led to the killing of hundreds of thousands of Sikhs, in what former PM David Cameron described as the greatest blot on post-partition history.

Chinese Products and Companies: Human Rights Violations – 20th July 2021

My Lords, I fully support the need for sanctions against China and Chinese products for the gross abuse of human rights in the persecution of the Uighur Muslims and other minorities, and the people of Hong Kong. Does the Minister agree that our actions would carry greater weight if we looked closely at our policies? Does he agree that refugees fleeing the Middle East are human beings, and jailing them for daring to try and escape their misery is hardly consisent with Christian teachings?

Afghanistan – 12th July 2021

My Lords, many faiths—including a thriving Sikh population of many thousands—have had to flee Afghanistan because of the hardening of extremism, resulting from repeated invasions from Britain, then Russia and, more recently, America and the West. Bombs and missiles cannot change mindsets. Would the Minister agree with the statement by former Prime Minister Theresa May that Britain should stop being the self-appointed policeman of the world? It is a policy copied by others that creates ever more refugees in a suffering world.

International Freedom of Religion or Belief – 8th July 2021

I thank the Minister for his very helpful reply but, as we say in deepest Punjab, fine words butter no parsnips. The report shows that ignorance and exploitation of supposed religious difference is one of the greatest causes of conflict in the world today. The reality is that different faiths share many common ethical teachings. Does the Minister agree that the teaching of RE should focus on commonalities, rather than superficial difference? Does he also agree that the Government are sending out a wrong and shameful message in Dominic Raab's statement that human rights should be ignored in the pursuit of trade deals?

Channel 4: Funding and Governance – 1 July 2021

Can the Minister inform the House on whether BBC editorial policy trumps the law of the land regarding the legal rights of presenters and contributors? If so, should there

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not be safeguards in governance against the danger of individual producer prejudices being portrayed as BBC policy?

Marriage and Religious Weddings – 28th June 2021

My Lords, does the Minister agree with the words of a Christian hymn that "New occasions teach new duties; Time makes ancient good uncouth", and that religion and religious teachings should be interpreted in the context of today's times and the recognition of full gender equality? Does he agree that the Government's continuing reluctance to stand up for the rights of Muslim women and girls is not only a betrayal of government responsibility but an insult to the fair name of Islam?

BBC: Freedom of Information Legislation – 24th June 2021

Does the Minister agree that misunderstanding and misuse of religion is one of the greatest causes of conflict in the world today? When a BBC fundamentalist Christian producer tries to stop a Sikh presenter on "Thought for the Day" speaking about Guru Nanak, the founder of the Sikh faith, or Guru Tegh Bahadur, who gave his life standing up for the right of freedom of belief of those of another faith, such arrogance shoud be open to challenge and scrutiny.

Human Rights at Sea – 22nd June 2021

My Lords, more than 20,000 refugees fleeing conflict in the Middle East have drowned in the last six years, many as a direct result of bombing and missile attacks by countries such as Britain, America and Russia pursuing so-called strategic interests. Does the Minister agree that we have a moral responsibility to look to the welfare and care of innocent civilians trying to escape by sea to a better life?

Private Landlords: Tenants with Pets – 15th June 2021

My Lords, depression and loneliness have an adverse impact on health and cost the country millions. Having someone or a pet to look after takes us out of ourselves, and pets have undoubtedly helped mitigate the enforced isolation of the pandemic. Does the Minister agree that a more collaborative approach between landlords and tenants in keeping tenants happy and keeping property in good condition would benefit both?

Constitution Inquiry – 14th June 2021

Arrogant patriotism is an infantile disease like measles. In its new virulent form, it has led to Brexit and now threatens the union with Scotland. Does the Minister agree that former Prime Minister Gordon Brown is right when he says that we should drop divisive talk of "us and them" and look to commonalities of interest to make for a more equal and stronger union?

Net Migration – 25th May 2021

My Lords, the Home Secretary says that we welcome those in genuine need of sanctuary, except those forced to flee in small boats. Many of those people have lost their homes and livelihoods as a result of conflict in the Middle East made worse by the intervention of outside countries, including the UK. Does the Minister therefore agree that we have a moral obligation to give shelter to those we have helped make homeless refugees?

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Fire Safety: Leaseholder Bankruptcies – 24th May 2021

My Lords, the Government's promise of a building safety Bill to reduce the possibility of future Grenfell-type disasters is welcome, but does the Minister agree that it is an acknowledgement of past national failure to ensure adequate fire safety standards, and that it should be the responsibility of the Government rather than of individuals to meet the cost of urgently needed safety improvements to existing property?

Rent Arrears: Covid-19 – 20th May 2021

My Lords, although the excellent furlough scheme has helped to reduce some financial suffering during the pandemic, the reduced incomes of individuals and households have led to increased arrears for many tenants. If we are to avoid the hardships of a rise in homelessness with the ban on evictions due to end this summer, will the Minister consider loans to be used exclusively to clear rent arrears, as has been mentioned by many speakers?

Railway Industry Association Report – 18th May 2021

'Why Rail Electrification?' rightly claims that electricity is the cleanest and most efficient power source for UK railways, but electricity itself must be cleanly produced. It cannot be stored and requires the use of energy to convert it to other potential energy. There are other linked components to the use and distribution of power; does the Minister agree that tackling each of these in parallel is essential in meeting the target of net-zero emissions by 2050?

Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting – 17th May 2021

My Lords, I hoped that the Commonwealth would be recognised for its even-handed condemnation of the abuse of human rights—but this is not so. We stridently condemn human rights abuse in China or Myanmar but are comparatively silent when Muslims in India are called "termites" by the Indian Government, laws are passed to deny them citizenship and forced conversions take place in Pakistan. Today, the common ethos of the Commonwealth is common hypocrisy. Will Her Majesty's Government take urgent steps at the meeting in Rwanda to reverse this trend?

Covid-19: Support for India – 27th April 2021

My Lords, India has brilliant scientists and the largest vaccine-making and exporting facility in the world yet its Government, referring to Muslims as termites, seem to be more focused on creating a Hindu India than battling the Covid crisis. Will the Minister agree that while we should continue sending welcome medical supplies, we should also urge our Commonwealth partner to allow India's scientific and medical talent to take the lead in logistics, safety precautions and treatment to combat the deadly pandemic?

Commonwealth War Graves Commission: Historical Inequalities Report - 26 April 2021

My Lords, only after my comparatively recent criticism on radio that millions of Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs had fought and died in the two world wars was it agreed by the Blair Government to invite other faiths to join Christians and Jews at the Cenotaph

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observance. Ignorance and prejudice pervade all societies. Does the Minister agree that, rather than showing periodic righteous indignation when racism hits the headlines, the Government and faith leaders should lead in ensuring that the dignity and equality of all human beings is made central to the teachings of both history and religion?

Fire Safety: Leaseholder Bankruptcies – 24th May 2021

My Lords, the Government's promise of a building safety Bill to reduce the possibility of future Grenfell-type disasters is welcome, but does the Minister agree that it is an acknowledgement of past national failure to ensure adequate fire safety standards, and that it should be the responsibility of the Government rather than of individuals to meet the cost of urgently needed safety improvements to existing property?

Covid-19: Update – 20th April 2021

My Lords, India being placed on the red list will cause real hardship to many UK citizens with close family ties in the subcontinent. Does the Minister agree that, while this has necessitated the cancellation of the Prime Minister's visit to India, it will also have prevented him bringing back a virulent strain of the virus 'Modius bigotus', which attacks and can seriously harm a country's entire democratic immune system?

Hong Kong: Pro-Democracy Campaigners – 19th April 2021

My Lords, while we all condemn the incarceration of democratic activists in Hong Kong, there is very little we can do to help them. Economic or cultural sanctions can be only a token of disapproval. Does the Minister agree that it would add weight to our criticism if we were more even-handed in criticising gross human rights abuse wherever it occurs, even in so-called friendly countries, such as Saudi Arabia?

Crown Courts: Outstanding Cases – 15th April 2021

My Lords, the Covid pandemic has led to a surge of cases awaiting trial in the Crown Court. While the setting up of special Nightingale courts to help clear the backlog is welcome, delays to effective hearings are leading to additional stress and anxiety, particularly for vulnerable victims. Does the Minister agree that, in looking to greater efficiency, we need to look harder at cutting the considerable time spent on cases that do not move to trial?

Clergy: EU Visas and Residence Permits – 13th April 2021

My Lords, the Question reminds us that we have inextricable ties of culture, trade and even religion with our former partners in the European Union. Does the Minister agree that, rather than looking selectively to the concerns of Anglicans, we should be looking to better working arrangements for all branches of Christianity, as well as other faiths and cultures, in reducing onerous visa requirements and enhancing better living and working arrangements with our former partners in Europe?

His Royal Highness The Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh – 12th April 2021

My Lords, His Royal Highness Prince Philip served our country with a rare mix of wisdom and boundless energy. His contribution was immense, particularly in inspiring

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the young by promoting initiative and commitment in establishing the Duke of Edinburgh's Award. My children and grandchildren have benefited from the challenges and the sense of achievement in gaining a coveted Duke of Edinburgh's Award. It is a scheme that takes youngsters away from their comfort zone in building resilience, new skills and new friendships.

The Sikh Messenger

We have just published the latest edition of *The Sikh Messenger*. We are now making some editions of our quarterly magazine available on our website www.nsouk.co.uk. Individuals who want to pitch an idea for *The Sikh Messenger* can reach the editors: info@nsouk.co.uk – follow us on Twitter @SikhMessenger

All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for International Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB)

Lord Singh is Vice-Chair for the APPG for FoRB and during the last year the NSO has raised human rights violations with the APPG stakeholders including the persecution of Sikhs in Afghanistan.

Report compiled by Hardeep Singh, Deputy Director NSO

Prison Chaplaincy

Faith Advisor & Director Lord Singh of Wimbledon. Deputy Directors Gagandeep Singh and Ajmer Singh

The Prison Sikh Chaplaincy Service had a very successful bi-annual, two days residential training event held in March 2022. Sikh Prison Governors, Simi Sethi, Jag Mavi and Deputy Director Tajinder Singh Matharu also attended as the guest speakers and shared their valuable operational knowledge with the Prison Sikh Chaplains. This was really appreciated as it was needed to upskill our team. Ministry of Defence Sikh Chaplain, Mandeep Kaur also took part in our conference.

This event was held in partnership with the Prison Chaplaincy HQ. Ven James Ridge, Head of Chaplaincy Services for HMPPS also delivered one session.

Books and the Sikh Artefacts donated by Khalsa Aid was distributed to all the Prison Sikh Chaplains, to be used in their respective establishments. We really appreciate the support by Khalsa Aid and hope that they will continue to do this in future. Sikh diaries were also distributed.

Generally speaking, the Covid restrictions are gradually ending and the Sikh Service and the Sikh study classes have been started. Our team is currently preparing to organise Diwali Bandi Chor Diwas celebrations and Guru Nanak Sahib's Parkash Purb in November in all prison establishments.

Our Director Lord Singh is liaising with the Ministers highlighting the disparity of resources provided to Non Abrahamic Faiths.

Deputy Director Gagandeep Singh have been appointed as Chair for 'Sikhs in MoJ'. This will enable him to be the voice of Sikh Civil Servants working across the different

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agencies of Ministry of Justice. He can also raise awareness of the Sikh Faith in the MoJ. Their official launch of the Group will be on 1st of November 2022 at MoJ HQ.

We thank all the gurdwaras, organisations and the individuals who continue to support the work of Prison Sikh Chaplains. This is by giving us Prashad, Indian sweets for Sikh Festivals and donating Sikh prayer books and other artefacts.

The Prison Sikh Chaplaincy would urge gurdwaras to be more receptive of the Sikhs coming out of prison and help them resettle back in the community so that they don't reoffend.

Gagandeep Singh Deputy Director

Inter Faith Involvement

1) As the national faith community representative member body of the Inter Faith Network for the UK (IFN), NSO has continued to represent the Sikh community both on its Board of Trustees and the Faith Communities Forum. The former largely deals with matters of governance, formulating policy and management of the work it carries out with the aim of building good relations between different faiths; whilst the latter provides a platform for the national faith communities representative bodies to discuss issues of common concern.

Some Salient Points for the Period:

- Most of IFN's meetings and activities have continued to be held on-line due to the Covid-19 pandemic. However, the last Board meeting towards the end of September 2022 was held in person at the IFN's new Offices.
- IFN has been going through a rather challenging times due to much delayed receipt of Government funding and the uncertainty that is being felt about this support in the future.
- I also served and/or still serve on various IFN subcommittees and working groups, namely:
  Finance and General Purposes Sub-committee, Co-Chair Nomination Panel, Working Group on Diversity and Strategic Plan Working Group
- During one of the FCF meetings, Lord Singh had requested an urgent statement on faith communities' response to refugees and asylum seekers. Although a statement was ultimately issued, it was not that strongly worded and certainly not in line with Lord Singh's observation that a generalised statement would never make headlines and would never influence society.
- Messages from Faith Leaders on social media: To mark the Inter Faith Week in November 2021, Lord Singh posted a message on social media on the theme of inter faith solidarity.

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- A Faith Engagement Adviser at the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities was invited to one of the FCF meetings. He is undertaking a Review looking at various aspects of Government engagement with the faith communities. The report is expected to be published in the Autumn 2022.
- Revd Canon Hilary Barber, who is a Vicar of Halifax Minster in West Yorkshire, was appointed the other Co-Chair from 1st January 2022.

2) A talk on Sikh Religion and Culture was given to:
   - Women's Institute, Glasshouses, North Yorkshire
   - Barwick and Scholes Probus Club, West Yorkshire
3) Representation on North Yorkshire SACRE as well as on Bradford SACRE continues.

Report compiled by Mohinder Singh Chana, Interfaith Representative NSO

BOOK REVIEW

From Where I Stand

- Lord Indarjit Singh's autobiography

Indarjit Singh, or Lord Singh of Wimbledon is widely recognised as a leader of Britain's Sikh community. When being introduced by the British Ambassador to Estonia, he was referred to as 'the man who brought Guru Nanak to the Breakfast tables of Britain', for his inspiring broadcasts on BBC Radio 4. But what's the story behind Singh's journey towards faith leadership?

From Where I Stand reveals how his newly qualified father, Dr Diwan Singh, railed against British rule in India, by bandaging up Sikh protestors pledged to non-violence, being beaten by police. It was, a selfless and courageous act, which led to the family's eventual exile from Punjab to Britain. Diwan Singh, after gaining further medical qualifications, set up as a general practitioner overcoming prejudice of a pre-war Britain. His dynamism led him to become president of one of Britain's first Sikh gurdwaras in Shepherds Bush, London, as well as a leading figure in the movement for India's freedom from British Imperialism. He was popular amongst Hindu, Sikhs and Muslims – the Singh family had distinguished guests meet them at home, not least Krishna Menon who became India's first High Commissioner to the UK after independence in 1947; and Udham Singh who later famously took revenge for the Jallianwala Bagh massacre.

Indarjit, one of 4 siblings (along with his elder brothers Gurbachan, Surinder and younger brother Jagjit), was destined to follow in his father's footsteps of leadership. As a child growing up in wartime Britain, Indarjit was rebellious from the start. On his first day at school, he chose to avoid walking up the stairs, choosing to climb up a sandy adjacent slope – to the chagrin of his teacher and parents. During VE celebrations he went to the green grocer's shop owned by a Mr V Pendry (a name he later used as an alias for his writing criticising the actions of the then Indian government). Looking at a 13-year-old Indarjit, the shopkeeper said, 'you lot must be Germans because you're not celebrating', to which Indarjit responded in his best

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German accent 'Ja', eliciting raucous laughter amongst customers in the shop. This early sense of humour became a characteristic trait of Indarjit.

From Where I Stand is punctuated with seminal moments, like the time he met Kanwaljit (Lady Singh of Wimbledon), visiting the pyramids of Egypt on camelback whilst on honeymoon, and the birth of the couple's daughters. It follows his distinguished career in the mining industry. He then worked for the contractor Costain whilst also studying for an MBA. He then moved to the 'people's republic' of Hackney as a management consultant. The book reveals Singh's politics were neither left nor right, despite Bernard Weatherill MP (who later become Speaker of the House of Commons), trying to persuade him to join the Conservative party, and regardless of working as a civil servant in a far-left leaning council. During the passage of his career, Indarjit found that he was increasingly writing about religion and politics, and increasingly in the public eye, appearing on mainstream television. One TV programme called *From Where I Stand* was about his challenges and priorities as a Sikh in the 1980s.

It was events in India in 1984 which led Singh to take early retirement, something he was able to do because of some shrewd investments. He later set up the Network of Sikh Organisations in 1987, a leading Sikh charity for which he remains the director – and one which works for the betterment of British Sikhs. Singh became a leading voice of protest against the anti-Sikh genocide, which started with the military assault on Sikhism's holiest shrine – the Golden Temple by the Indian Army in 1984.

When writing in India about earlier discrimination against Sikhs, he used the alias 'Victor Pendry', (his wife Kanwaljit had heard of Mr Pendry, before she met Indarjit). Now, in 1984 in the UK, writing in his own name, he challenged the then Indira Gandhi government with articles like one in the *Guardian* on India's atrocities against Sikhs titled: 'Gandhi *Speak that cloaks the murderous truth'*. Singh set up the Sikh Messenger promoting interfaith understanding and remains the editor today.

He has been widely celebrated for his contribution to British society and became a household name for his contributions to BBC Radio Thought for the Day. He has advised former Prime Minister's like Gordon Brown and Tony Blair and helped set up the Lambeth Group of Faith Leaders to advise on 'Values for the New Millennium'. A couple of years after receipt of a Broadcasting Gold Medallion, he was awarded the UK Templeton Prize for Promoting Religious Understanding – the only Sikh to have received this honour. He is one of the co-founders of the Interfaith Network for the UK and nominated as the 'people's peer' in a poll of Radio 4 listeners (second only to Bob Geldof) and made a life peer in 2011.

From Where I Stand includes a selection of TFTD's transcripts – a sentence from one perfectly sums up the core motivation of crossbench peer Lord Singh of Wimbledon - '…as a Sikh, I believe our own sense of wellbeing is directly proportional to the amount of our life we devote to helping those around us.'

From Where I Stand is clearly uplifting and inspiring, a good read for anyone interested in a more understanding and cohesive society. It is available on Amazon, most bookshops and from publishers Austin Macauley.

Hardeep Singh, NSO deputy-director and assistant editor of *The Sikh Messenger*

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